

Tips for working with the Media

National Infant Immunization Week 2006

Local media can assist in educating the public about timely immunization and be an integral part of your NIIW program and events.

Many of the activities ideas suggested in the *Preparing for NIIW* section involve working with the media; others, such as establishing an information center or holding a seminar on immunization, will need publicity to be successful.

Publicity can extend the impact of your activities. A special event—such as a speaker at a club's luncheon—can be preceded and followed by publicity about the speaker on the radio, in TV announcements, and in the local newspaper. This type of media involvement helps get the message out to a larger audience.

Also keep in mind that mass media outlets may be interested in doing more than just providing publicity. Many large-scale, community-based health programs and events have been co-sponsored by a television station, a health insurance company, and a voluntary or public agency, each contributing according to its special capabilities.

Develop a Media List

A list of media contacts may be your single most important resource, say public relations experts. Don't be tempted to skip this step. When you know the names, telephone and fax numbers, email and special interests of individual journalists, you can send materials and news releases directly to those most likely to use them.

To start a media list, scan newspapers and monitor radio and TV shows to learn the names of reporters who cover health topics. You also can check media directories, which are available online, at libraries, or through organizations such as the Public Relations Society of America. Also consider collaborating with partner organizations that already have an updated media list. When you call or visit the people on your media list, ask about deadlines, special interests, and informational needs. Add this information to your list.

Make Initial Contacts

Whenever you can, arrange to meet face-to-face with reporters, editors, and producers. Bring your article, news release, radio live announcer copy, or any other materials you want them to use. If you are asking them to cover an event, bring background information with you to leave behind.

Emphasize the importance of immunization education to the community. Use this opportunity to offer your services, if appropriate, as an expert resource on infant immunization who can be called upon in the future. If you have designated a program spokesperson—a key leader who will be the public speaker about infant immunization—tell media contacts about that person. Be sure to leave your card or telephone number.

If you send materials to the people on your media list, allow 4 to 7 days for the materials to arrive, and then follow up with a phone call. Ask if they have received the materials, offer to

answer any questions, and emphasize the important points related to your community. If a story does appear, send a short note of thanks. If a story does not appear, send a letter of thanks for their consideration and ask to be considered for a future issue.

Prepare a Media Advisory

The media advisory is your opportunity to alert the media to your upcoming event. It should be directed to reporters, producers, or editors. Be sure to mention the person the reporter can interview and what could be discussed as well as describe possible photo opportunities.

You will increase the likelihood of having your event covered by the media if you can provide a visual opportunity for the media to photograph events, such as children being vaccinated or community members sharing immunization information with their neighbors. Work with your local partners to arrange such a photo opportunity. (Note: a hospital/clinic can advise you on the necessary patient agreement procedures.)

Tips for Writing a Media Advisory

A media advisory should be brief and contain important information such as who, what, when, where, and why. When writing a media advisory, remember the following:

- Include your target audience (Editors, Producers, and Reporters).
- Include a media contact name, organization, and telephone number.
- Limit the advisory to one page.
- Provide a description of possible photo and interview opportunities.
- Send the media advisory 2-3 weeks before the event to local news editors and follow up with a phone call. Refax or email advisory 2-3 days before the event.
- Be sure to send your media alerts to wire services and ask them to list your event on their “daybooks” (a calendar of upcoming news events kept by wire services, such as AP, UPI, and Reuters).

Prepare New Releases

News releases are standard publicity tools, and reporters and editors receive many each week. To draw attention to your release, format it professionally and send it to your established contacts. Follow up later by telephone. When writing a news release, keep in mind reporters’ and editors’ needs as you write a news release. Journalists are most likely to find your release useful if you:

- Present information that is new, timely, and unusual.
- Use a local or human interest angle if you present national data.
- Tie your story to a national event or one that is already receiving wide coverage.

Tips for Writing News Releases

When developing your news release, remember the following:

- Use an attention grabbing headline.
- Post a dateline on the release.
- Include a contact name and telephone number.
- Start with a strong lead paragraph containing the important information such as the who, what, when, where, and why. Keep the information concise and interesting.
- Limit the release to one or two pages. Mark the end of the release with the following symbols, ###.

- Type on letterhead, double spaced.
- Send the news release five to seven days prior to the event and follow up with a phone call to confirm media participation.

Prepare Opinion-Editorials, Letters to the Editor, and Letters to Editorial Boards

The editorial section is the place to express a viewpoint or announce your services. Editorial pages often include letters to the editor and opinion-editorial (op-ed) pieces. An op-ed piece is an article, usually 500-800 words long, that carries an author's byline. They appear on the page opposite the editorial page and present an expert point of view on a specific topic. An op-ed piece might be titled, for example, "Are Communities Missing the Opportunity to Immunize Their Babies?"

A letter to the editor, usually less than 300 words, is signed by an individual or a coalition from the community. Often, this individual writes as a representative of an organization. A letter to the editor is usually written in response to an event or an article in the newspaper in which it will appear. The letter should express an opinion, clarify a point, or emphasize a message.

To place an op-ed piece or letter to the editor, address it to the editorial page editor or, in a smaller newspaper, the editor-in-chief. At television, cable, and public access stations, which sometimes present editorials on important local issues, contact the editorial writer or general manager.

Tips for Writing an Op-ed Piece or Letter to the Editor

- Keep letters to the editor short. Op-ed pieces can be longer.
- Make sure your arguments and tone are logical and persuasive.
- Provide background information, copies of recent news releases, or stories about your program to convince editors that your op-ed is important to the community.
- Ask for and follow style guidelines, and deliver your piece on or before the deadline.

Another way to gain access to the editorial page is by asking the newspaper to editorialize on behalf of your organization's activity or services. You can do this by writing a letter to an editorial board member about the importance of your campaign. If appropriate, you may wish to request a meeting with the newspaper's editorial board to discuss your issues. The editorial board usually includes the newspaper's editor, publisher, and the editorial page editor. Members are generally listed somewhere on the first page of the editorial section.

Tips for Writing to the Editorial Board

- Address your letter directly to one editorial board member.
- State the importance of timely immunization for infants and toddlers 24 months and under.
- State the challenges in your community with respect to immunization.
- State why the newspaper should support your immunization campaign.
- Note any upcoming events with respect to your campaign.
- Request a meeting with the editorial board (if appropriate).
- Follow up your request for a meeting with a telephone call.

Solicit Interviews

Talk shows, call-in shows, and public affairs programs all provide publicity opportunities, often in the form of interviews. Newspaper and magazine editors also may be interested in interviewing a community leader or expert.

Tips on arranging an interview:

- Choose a program or publication that reaches your audience.
- Send a letter to its producer or editor, explaining that you would like to talk about infant immunization and why an interview would be of interest to readers or listeners.
- Follow up the letter with a telephone call.
- Send briefing materials to the interviewer or producer, including the spokesperson's credentials as an expert.

Make sure the spokesperson is thoroughly prepared for the interview. They should review talking points and key messages, organize information, and write important points on note cards if necessary. Although the interviewer will have questions, you can keep key message points in mind and be prepared to make simple, direct, easy-to-understand statements when they fit the questions.

After the interview, get back to the reporter promptly (preferably the same day) with any information you promised to supply following the interview. Finally, send a note thanking the reporter for the opportunity to express your point of view.